

CHARITY

THE

34

Bond of Perfectness:

O R,

CHRIST'S *Law of* Love,

THE

Perfectest SCHEME

O F

RELATIVE DUTY,

A N D

HUMAN HAPPINESS.

By BENJAMIN OWEN.


Addressed to Christians and Deists.

L O N D O N :

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THE
P R E F A C E
TO THE
R E A D E R.

HE Reason of my composing the following Discourse, was a Desire I had, to lead myself, and some others, to a full Exercise of that Temper, which is describ'd in it, at a Time, when there were considerable Temptations, to a contrary Disposition: If those who first heard it, receive any further Benefit by this Publication, I have my Desire, with respect to them, which is, that they may prosper as well as others.

My making publick at this Time, a Persuasive to the Exercise of Christian Charity, will not be judged unseasonable by any, who believe it to be a fundamental Duty of Christianity, and necessary to their Happiness in this, and the coming World; because

nothing of that Importance can be too frequently insisted on, and different Ways and Manners of treating the same Subject, may make it more generally intelligible and convictive.

As for those who have, through an indulged Selfishness, or froward Zeal, stifled all generous and kind Emotions of Heart, towards any but such as be like themselves, it is not to be expected, but they will always think Discourses of this kind unnecessary, if not prejudicial, by reason of their Tendency to molest what they count a prudent Care of Self, as a necessary Concern for the Essentials of their Sect and Party: But if there be such a Thing as a faulty Self-Love, and criminal Confinement of our Benevolence and Complacency, whence arise all the Evils Men suffer from one another in this World; then it can never be out of Season, to endeavour a Revival of that god-like Disposition among Men, which will cause them to be mutually helpful to each other, and serve to alleviate the Sense of those natural Evils, none can wholly avoid, as it will also qualify them for the social Happiness of a future State.

If this small Book should fall into the Hands of any who doubt the Truth of Christianity; and they will condescend to peruse it, I would hope they will perceive so much of the Beauty and Excellency of Christian Charity, as must oblige them to own it a very strong internal Evidence of a divine Revelation, in as much as it is a more ex-
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alted Virtue than any recommended by the heathen Moralists, much beyond their boasted Friendship and Love of their Country, which are commonly placed in Competition with it, but which are too confin'd Affections to produce any Thing, like that universal Good among Men, which Christian Charity was design'd to promote, and would certainly effect, were it generally practis'd.

It's a very great Pity, that so few of those who profess Subjection to Christ, should either understand or comply with his Royal Law of Love. Many Endeavours have been used to promote the Observance of this new Commandment, without much Effect; but God may be yet intreated to give better Success, therefore may the God of Love and Peace send the Residue of his Spirit among Christians, that as they are undoubtedly united in a Community of Faith, (as to those Truths that be of the Foundation,) so they may be more thoroughly united in a Community of Affection; and that instead of Pride and Vain-Glory, rigid Censure and Calumny, Discord and Violence, and other evil Fruits of a false and intemperate Zeal for the odd Singularities of different Parties, a well regulated Zeal may take Place, proportion'd to the Worth and Moment of Things, attended with fervent Charity to all the Members of Christ Jesus, and unconfin'd Benevolence to all Men.

Thus may Christianity approve itself to be of God, by the Obedience of its Professors, to the Law of Love; which will give
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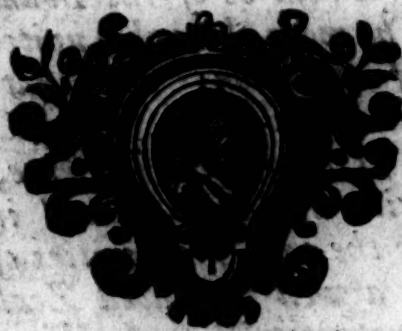
the World a sensible Demonstration of that Peace and Happiness, Charity alone can produce.

If the following Sheets will be in the least Degree serviceable to promote a Spirit of universal Kindness, I have my Reward; if not, I shall still have a Pleasure resulting from the Consciousness, of sincerely endeavouring to benefit my Fellow Creatures, and this no Man can take from me.

Ely-Court, Nov. 18.

1728.

Benj. Owen.



C H A R I T Y



CHARITY

THE

Bond of Perfectness.



CO L. iii. 14.

*And above all these Things, put on Charity,
which is the Bond of Perfectness.*



THE visible Decay of benevolent Dispositions, among them who would be thought Christians, even of the purer Kind, makes it highly expedient, frequently to insist on the great and necessary Gospel Duty of Charity.

OUR Blessed Lord, who came into the World to destroy the Works of the Devil, and to restore, within Men, those kind and tender Inclinations towards one another, which would render them most like their heavenly Father, the kindest and best of Beings, left it among his Followers, as his parting Advice, that they

John xiii.
34. 35.

should particularly, and above all Things, attend to *this*, as the Spirit and Life of their Profession: For, says he, *a new Commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another; by this shall all Men know, that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love, one to another.*

THE primitive Christians paid a singular Respect to this express Command of their Lord; and, tho' there were as great Variety of Tempers and Dispositions among them, as other Men, and even considerable Differences of Opinion, about religious Matters, among the *Jewish* and Gentile Converts, yet they maintain'd fervent Charity: So that it was remarkable among the Heathen, even to a Wonder, how the Christians loved one another!

BUT, how little of this excellent Spirit, this Christian Temper, is now to be met with among them, who call themselves by the Name of Christ? Is not the whole visible Church rent to Pieces, by a Spirit of Discord, and Uncharitableness? Do we not see whole Societies, and Christian Communities, hating one another, at least, keeping at a Distance, and abstaining from social and friendly Offices in Life, only because they happen to differ about Matters of Sentiment and Opinion? Nay, do not Members of the same Societies, who have nothing of Sentiment to quarrel about, yet so far indulge their particular Humours and Interests, as to harbour very ill-natur'd Affections, towards one another? For Anger, Strife, Calumny, Hatred, Malice, and the like, do very much abound; and the Frequency of them do (I am afraid) occasion them to be thought, only small Faults, if any at all: But whatever the Apprehensions of the Guilty may be; yet the Scripture is very express, that *Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath,*

Gal. v. 20,
21.

Wrath, Strife, and Envyings, are as destructive, as other Works of the Flesh, and that they who do such Things, shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. But what will best shew us the Malignity of such Practices, will be a Consideration of their opposite Virtue, Charity, which, in this Epistle, is recommended above all other Christian, Moral Virtues.

In the Chapter before me, St. Paul advises the *Colossians*, to the Practice of many Christian Virtues, as a proper Consequence of their being risen with Christ. The First of these, is spiritual Mindfulness, expressed by *seeking and setting their Affections on Things above*; intimating, they should have a peculiar Regard to heavenly Things, and frequently entertain them, in their Minds, as the most powerful Motives to avoid every Thing that is Evil, and pursue that which is Good. The Evils he would have them avoid, are those personal Vices, they were addicted to, while Heathen: Such as, *Fornication, Uncleanness, inordinate Affection, evil Concupiscences, and Covetousness, which is Idolatry*; and those relative Vices, which, after their Conversion to Christianity, they were prone to, as, perhaps, not thinking them of so Heinous a Nature, as the former; but the Apostle thought otherwise, and, therefore, advises them thus: *But now, you are Christians, do you also put off all these, Anger, Wrath, Malice, Blasphemy, or Evil-Speaking; filthy Communication, and lie not one to another; seeing you have put off the old Man, with his Deeds, and have put on the new Man, i.e. seeing you have abandon'd your old Conversation and Practices, and are, as it were, new Men, not living in your former Ignorance, but being well inform'd and instructed, you are become like him, who formed you to this, and who cannot lie or deceive: Therefore put off all those Vices, which be inconsistent with your new Character; and, as*

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the peculiar People of God, *Holy, and Beloved*, be sure you imitate him, *and put on Bowels of Mercy, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any Man have a Quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye*. Then follow the Words of the Text; *And, above all these Things, put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfectness.*

THE Apostle's Manner of Expression in this and the foregoing Verses, is, evidently, in Allusion to Garments; for the Vices he dissuades from, are represented as the Cloathing of the Old Man; and, therefore, he advises to put them off, and the Christian Virtues he exhorts them to put on, as a proper Dress for the New Man. But over, or upon all the other Virtues, he would have the *Celestial* put on Charity, as the most beautiful of all other Graces, which should, therefore, be wore continually in Sight, as an Upper Garment; that so it might appear from what Principle they acted; for, undoubtedly, by Charity, here, we are to understand Brotherly Love; which is the immediate Principle, or Spring, from whence all relative Duty, ought to flow; and without which, the most expensive Beneficence is no Virtue.

HENCE observe,

I. THAT Charity is the Bond of Perfectness.

II. THAT the Excellency of Charity, should prevail with us, to put it on.

I. *Charity is the Bond of Perfectness.*

THAT by Charity we are to understand Brotherly Love, will appear to any one who compares the twelfth Verse with the Text; for all those Things we are required to put on, have an immediate Relation to our Neighbour; and, therefore, that Love from which they are to proceed, as their Principle, must be of the same Nature.

As

Bond of Perfectness.

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As to the Term, *Bond of Perfectness*, it is a metaphorical Expression, intimating, that Love unites Persons and Things after the perfectest Manner: The original Word we translate *Bond*, *σύνδεσμος*. signifies such a Bond, as that whereby many Things are enclosed, and bound up together; and those Things this Bond is design'd to unite, are of that Nature, that nothing more contributes to their Perfection, than such an Union.

BUT in order to our more fully apprehending the Excellency of this Virtue of Charity, I shall consider,

I. THE Extent of this Charity, which the Apostle styles, the Bond of Perfectness.

II. How Charity unites Persons and Things.

III. THAT the Union resulting from Charity, is a Perfection, wherever it obtains.

THESE three Particulars, when duly examin'd, will give us a just Idea of the Nature and Importance of this amiable Grace, and also prepare us to receive with Meekness the Word of Exhortation, arising from the second general Head.

I. I WILL consider the Extent of that Charity, the Apostle styles, the Bond of Perfectness: And this I shall do, with respect to it's Objects, and the Degree of its Exercise, towards each of them.

I. IN general, all Men are the Objects of this Charity, and demand our Exercise of it towards them, in a certain Proportion.

THE several Degrees Charity, or Brotherly Love, is capable of, may all be compriz'd in these two Terms, *viz.* Benevolence and Complacency; the one signifies Good Will, or wishing well to any one; the other, a taking Pleasure and Delight in any Person, on account of some real or imaginary good Qualities.

CHARITY, as far as it is contain'd under the Term Benevolence, is due unto all Men: We ought to wish and desire the Happiness of all about us; and,

as an Evidence that our Wishes are sincere, should do all the Good we can, be ready to perform all kind Offices, and to prevent, as much as in us lies, the Misery of any Fellow-Creature. This should be the Consequence of such a Principle; and will be so where it is real; for true Love, or Charity, is an active Virtue, that will exert itself wherever it obtains, in all Offices of Kindness that are suitable to the Necessities of such as want; and where these are wanting, (when Opportunities and Abilities concur,) there, we may be sure, no true Principle of Charity subsists; and if such a Principle be pretended, it's as dead and useless, as Faith without Works; which the Apostle *James* evidently proves, when he says, *If a Brother or Sister be naked, and destitute of daily Food, and one of you say unto them, depart in Peace, be you warmed and filled, notwithstanding you give them not those Things that are needful to the Body, what doth it profit?*

James ii.
15, 16,

BUT, then, as we ought to justify our Pretences to any human and benevolent Dispositions, by doing all the Good we can unto others; so we must take heed, that whatever Acts of Kindness we do unto our Neighbours, do proceed from real Love and Affection to them; else they will not be Charity; for our doing ever so many beneficent Actions, if they arise not from an affectionate Regard to our Fellow-Creatures, will signify nothing. There is neither Virtue or Praise in any Thing of this Kind, if it derives from the low Principle of any Self-Interest, in this World; if it be done, only to promote our Reputation, or further some selfish Design; it is, in such a Case, bare human Policy, not Virtue; it is only a Counterfeit of that which is good; and nothing else can make it really so, but a disinterested Affection, and Love unfeigned, to the whole human Species.

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NAY, though beneficent Actions be perform'd to satisfy the Importunities of Conscience, as being apprehensive they are our Duty, and yet be not attended with a true benevolent Affection to the Person we help or serve, we shall be little the better for them; for without Love there can be no fulfilling the Law; and, therefore, such cold Beneficence will be no *profitable* Virtue to us, if it be any at all. This Remark is entirely agreeable to the Supposition St. Paul makes, that, *although he bestow'd all his Goods to feed the Poor, and had 3. not Charity, it would profit nothing.* 1 Cor. xiii.

Now a benevolent Disposition so forcible, as continually to determine us to do all the Good we can to our Fellow-Creatures, is what we ought to entertain towards all Men; and nothing can exempt us from this Degree of Charity, let Persons, Characters, Circumstances, or Relations (to us,) be what they will.

BAD Characters are, undoubtedly, the proper Objects of our Aversion; but not so the Persons who wear those Characters, at least, not in the same Proportion. We may, and ought to hate what is evil, and vicious; but we are not to hate the Persons, who are so; for we are obliged, by the Laws of Humanity and Christianity, to pity such, to wish their Reformation and Happiness, to pray for it, and to use any kind Offices, in our Power, for the promoting of it. Indeed, a Love of *Complacency* such Persons are by no Means entitled to, because their bad Qualities are supposed to exceed, in so high a Degree, their good and amiable ones: But *Benevolence* is certainly their Due, as they are Partakers, with us, in the same Nature; and they are entitled to all the external Evidences of such a Disposition, till, by some exorbitant Actions, they declare themselves Enemies to Society; in that Case, indeed, they are to be abandon'd to publick Resentment,

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and private Benevolence must give way to that general one we owe to the rest of our Species.

NEITHER will any *Circumstances* Persons are in, render them unworthy of our Benevolence. Those who are in prosperous Circumstances, meet with a great deal, not only of Benevolence, but Complacency too, in outward Appearance; and it is well if it be any more than Appearance; for most Persons are kindly affected to the Rich and Great, for their own sakes, not theirs: But there is a disinterested Benevolence due to the Rich and Powerful; for though they want no outward Service from us, but what they can, and therefore ought to compensate, yet we ought, without any selfish View, to wish them well, rejoice at their Prosperity, and even desire the Continuance of it, unless it be manifestly employed to the Hurt of others.

THE Poor, Destitute, and Afflicted, are so many Objects which Providence throws in our Way, for the outward Exercise of our Benevolence, by our supplying their Necessities, and alleviating their Grievs, according to our Ability, and the real Necessity of the Case.

BUT of all *Circumstances*, we find, by Experience, that those of a *religious Nature* do more than any other, weaken that kind Benevolence which Mankind owe one another; but however it has been, and still continues, in fact, to be so, yet it ought not so to be; for there can be nothing pleaded from Reason or Revelation, that can justify our withholding a benevolent Charity from those who differ from us ever so widely in religious Principles or Practices; (as to Differences among Christians, I shall speak to them anon; but here I am only treating of Mankind in general, many of whom profess very different and opposite Religions to those of others; and yet they are under strong Obligations to mutual Benevolence;) for *Reason* would

would shew Men that all have a Right to judge and act for themselves in Affairs of that Nature; and that any Person's using his Right in that Case, cannot immediately affect the Rights or Interests of other Men: So that there is no Reason why we should deny our Charity (as far as it's contained in Benevolence) to any of our Fellow-Creatures, let them be of what Religion they will, if so be, that, under the Pretence of Religion, they do not invade the Rights of other Men, or disturb the Peace of Societies. *Revelation* is so far from allowing an Alienation of our Affections, or a Denial of kind Offices to any Man of a different Religion from ourselves, that it enjoins the quite contrary; as appears from the Parable of the Man, who fell among Thieves, and who, when overlooked by them of his own Nation and Religion, was relieved, in a bountiful Manner, by a *Samaritan*. It is remarkable, that the Parable was spoke in Answer to the Question of a *Jewish* Lawyer, demanding who was his Neighbour; for the *Jews* being for particular Reasons forbid an Intimacy with People of another Religion, looked upon none as their Neighbour, but such as were of their own Nation, and thought they fulfilled the Law, of loving their Neighbour as themselves, if they confind all Acts of Kindness and Beneficence to their own People: But Christ, by that Parable, corrects the Mistake, and directs the Lawyer he spoke to, to go, and do as the good *Samaritan* had done, *i. e.* extend his Compassion and Assistance to all who wanted it, of whatever Nation or Religion they happen to be.

HENCE it appears, that a considerable Degree of Charity is due from Christians to *Jews* and *Pagans*; for Christianity allows not of Enmity to any Part of the human Nature; it's unhappy enough for them who are not Christians, that they have not received the Gospel, and we should not,
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Luke x.
30, &c.

by hating them, endeavour to make them more miserable.

Even the *Jews*, (once God's peculiar People,) though at present they lie under the Guilt of Christ's Blood, yet by no means deserve our Hatred; for as there be many glorious Promises of their Restoration, so we are oblig'd to pray for the Completion of those Promises; and if so, we must have some Charity for them, because such Prayers are very insignificant, which be void of Charity: The *Jews* then demand much Tenderness from us, as they are the natural Seed of Abraham, God's Friend; as to them pertained the Adoption, the Glory, the Covenants, the giving of the Law, the Service of God, and the Promises; whose were the Fathers, and of whom, according to the Flesh, Christ came.

Rom. ix.
4, 5.

Rom. xi.
11, 25, 26.

BESIDES, St. Paul tells us, their Fall is not final; but that through their Fall, Salvation is come unto the Gentiles; and that Blindness in Part is happened unto Israel, till the Fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved.

THE Gentile World likewise, which sits in Darkness, should share in our Charity; for there be Promises that they shall be brought out of their Darkness, into the marvellous Light of the Gospel: This we are to pray for, and contribute our Endeavours also, as far as we are able, to render them Partakers of those spiritual Blessings we enjoy; and in order to our being perfect in Love or Charity towards Mankind in general, we must not only extend our Benevolence to all, let their religious Principles be what they will, but also have a complacential Love for any who are good or virtuous, and that in Proportion to the Height of their moral Character; for the perfecting of this is the great End of all Religion.

BUT further, whatever Relations Persons are in to us, they have a Right to one Degree or other of our Charity.

SOME

Bond of Perfectness.

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SOME Relations demand the utmost Degrees of complacential Love; and though the opposite ones have no Right to this, yet a benevolent Affection is their due.

AMONG the various Relations Men may be in to one another, I will only consider the two opposite ones, any may be in to us, either as Friends or Enemies. *Friends*, while we think them such, we cannot but regard in a very different Manner to what we do others; and indeed we ought to do so; for we owe them not only Benevolence, but Complacency: But then we must not let the Regard we have for Friends swallow up our Charity to others, no, not our Benevolence to Enemies; else we shall fall into the same Mistake with the *Jews*, who interpreted the Law thus, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thine Enemy.* How wrong the *Jews* were in making this Gloss, may appear from their own Political Law, for there it is thus written, *If thou meet thine Enemy's Ox, or his Ass, going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again: If thou see the Ass of him that hateth thee, lying under his Burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help him.* And, indeed, most of the Civil Laws of any Community, are design'd to prevent, as far as may be, the outward bad Consequences of private Hatred and Revenge: But the Laws of Christ (which are design'd to influence the Minds of Men, as the most likely Way of thoroughly affecting their Practice) has expressly forbid all evil Affection to our Neighbour, considered as an Enemy; therefore our Lord, in Opposition to the forecited *Jewish* Maxim, thus teaches; *But I say unto you, love your Enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you, that you may be the Children of your Father which is in Heaven; for if you love them (only) which love you, what Reward have you?*

Mat. v. 43.

Exod.
xxiii. 4, 5.

Mat. v. 44,
45, 46.

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Now from the Letter of this Gospel Law, it is evident, what Degree of Charity, or Love, is due to Enemies : Not a Love of Complacency or Delight ; for that would be commanding an Impossibility, and a confounding the very different Rights of Friends and Enemies : But it is a Love of Benevolence, exerting itself in blessing them, doing good to them, and praying for them ; and the Reason offer'd (which is, that so doing will make us like our heavenly Father) proves it to be a Love of Benevolence, and no more ; for God does not love the Evil and Unjust, with a Love of Complacency, but he continues to them the Bounty of his Providence, as an Evidence of his Benevolence and Willingness to lead them unto Repentance. Besides, this benevolent Regard to Enemies, in Imitation of the Deity, is entitled to a Reward hereafter, which a higher Degree of Love to Friends has no Claim to ; because the Complacency we have in Friends is so natural a Pleasure, that our Tendency to it is involuntary ; and it no more needs or deserves a Reward, than any other innocent Gratification of a natural Appetite.

Thus the Law of Reason and Christianity perfectly agree, both of them requiring such a Temper and Disposition, among Mankind, towards each other, as may best conduce to the greatest Good of the Whole ; allowing, indeed, of confin'd Affections, in some particular Relations ; but not permitting them to be so confin'd, as to destroy all Benevolence towards any, or even Complacency, in beautiful Characters, where we are under no personal Engagements ; for this would be allowing what, in the Main, must unavoidably produce more natural Evil than Good in the World, (as all violent, personal, or party Attachment have sufficiently made appear;) and, therefore, it must be undeniably true, that all Men are
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the Objects of our Charity, in some Degree or other.

2. ALL Christian Societies, which make up the visible Church of Christ, are, in a peculiar Manner, the Objects of our Charity.

If Men, as our Fellow-Creatures, are entitled to our Love and Charity in certain Degrees, whatever their Character, Circumstances, or Relation be, our Fellow-Christians have an additional Right to our Charity; and, in Proportion, as they answer the Christian Character, we are obliged to extend to them a more affectionate Benevolence or Complacency, than to other Men.

CHRIST, who is the Head of the whole collective Body of Christians, has an undoubted Right, to our warmest Affection; and if we do, indeed, love him, we shall think ourselves obliged to love those who are related to him, and the rather, because we ourselves are, in the same Manner, related to him, and, by that Means, bear a singular Relation to all our Fellow-Christians. The Apostle Paul expresses the Relation thus: *We, being many, are one Body in Christ, and every one of us Members; one of another.* Rom. xii. 5.

Now, this spiritual Relation should inspire us, with a complacential Love and Charity towards the whole Body of Christ, even to all who profess their Subjection to Christ, as their Lord and Saviour; who build their Faith on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Christ himself being acknowledged by them, as the Head, or Chief Corner-Stone, and who walk, in some Degree, worthy of the Gospel Vocation.

WHEREVER these general Characters of Christianity are, thither our Charity should extend itself, notwithstanding any Diversity of Sentiment and Opinion, or Differences, as to external Forms; for wherever Christ is present, there our Charity ought to centre; and where two or three are met

together, to call upon God, through him, in Sincerity and Truth, there he has promised to be present; and, undoubtedly, is so, whatever Diversity there be in outward Forms, if so be, there is nothing in them contradictory to his Prescription. And, as to doctrinal Differences, *if they are not such as affect the Foundation; if they be not about such Truths, as are very distinctly revealed; or have a Note of Necessity annexed to them; or have an immediate and necessary Influence upon Christian Practice;* they will not affect any Man's Christianity; and, therefore, ought not to weaken the mutual Exercise of Christian Charity. It's highly probable, that Christ has left some Things in a general and a doubtful Light, on purpose to exercise the Faculties of the most Inquisitive and Discerning; and, at the same Time, to give all his Followers an Opportunity for mutual Forbearance and Charity, amidst Diversity of Opinion; for, after all Disputes are over, Faith will be in Proportion to the Clearness wherein any Thing is apprehended to be revealed.

HOWEVER true, therefore, it is, that all Christians are to judge and act for themselves, (if capable,) in Things of a religious Nature; yet, it is as true, that all who hold the Essentials of Christian Doctrine and Worship, deserve our Christian Love and Charity, though they differ from us in lesser Things, as much as they do who agree with us, not only in Essentials, but Circumstantials; and the Reason is, because Essentials, and not Circumstantials, give the best Pretence to Christianity; for an Agreement or a Disagreement in Circumstantials, does not make any Person either a better or worse Christian: The only Goodness in any of those Things arises from Mens personal Persuasion; but the Essentials of Christianity must be held

and practised, where there is any just Claim to the Christian Name ; and where they are, the Character is compleat without any Thing else.

THE Consequence then must be, that an Agreement in Circumstantials, having no Part in the real Character of a Christian, can lay no Claim to a more than ordinary Degree of Love or Charity, as due to a Christian, on account of his being such ; and where there is a peculiar Affection appropriated to such as agree with us in lesser Matters, it is only a Fondness for our own Judgment, and a Complacency we naturally fall into, towards such as have a like Turn of Mind with ourselves : But this ought to be distinguish'd from that Charity we owe unto Persons, on account of their belonging unto Christ ; which all those who stick to the Foundation, are supposed to do.

IN this View of Things, the Protestant Churches at Home and Abroad, ought to entertain fervent Charity towards each other, because they professedly avow their Adherence to the same necessary Articles of Faith, are built upon the same Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, and found all their Hopes of eternal Life on one and the same *High-Priest of their Profession, even Jesus Christ the Righteous.* Heb. iii. 1.

THUS Unity of Faith and Hope demands the highest Degree of Christian Charity ; and Differences about smaller Things should not abate that Love : For as, in the Body Natural, though one Member be more curiously adorned than another, yet it does not thereby become more a Member of that Body than the other ; so, in the Mystical Body of Christ (the Church) all who agree in the essential Doctrines of Christ, are Members of his Body, however they may be distinguished by other Things ; and, therefore, ought

ought to love one another as Brethren and Fellow-Heirs of the same Grace.

As to those Branches of the Christian Church that are Popish, there is no Difficulty in asserting, that the same Degree of Charity is not due to them, as to those who are sounder in the Faith; for how much soever of Christ's Doctrine those Churches retain among them; yet they have left the great Foundation of Christianity, *viz.* the Authority of Christ, as speaking to us intelligibly in the Holy Scriptures; and have laid another Foundation, *viz.* Tradition and human Authority; so that if they may be called Churches of Christ, they are very corrupt ones: However, though we cannot have much Charity for them, as Christian Churches, because built upon a wrong Foundation; yet, concerning many particular Members of those Churches, we ought to judge charitably, because the Errors they are engaged in, may be invincible by them; and, through the Influence of those Gospel Truths, that be still preserved among them, they may attain to Salvation; nay, even the worst among them, we are obliged, in Christian Humanity, to pity, and pray for their Conversion.

THE other Part of a Christian Character, which renders Persons the proper Objects of our highest Complacency, is, their walking worthy of the Gospel Vocation: But, in order to our knowing this to the best Advantage, there must be a Personal Acquaintance: Therefore,

3. MEMBERS of the same Christian Societies are still more immediate Objects of one another's Charity.

THERE is no doubt, but the very same Offices of Love and Charity are due from Members of the visible Church in general, to each other, upon all Occasions that offer, as from Members of any one par-

particular Society to one another; but in the latter Case, where many Christians dwell in a Neighbourhood, and have frequent Opportunities of conversing together, they may oftener have occasion of exercising some particular Acts of Charity towards one another, than towards distant Communities, and their Members; for by being in so near a Relation, they are Eye-Witnesses of one another's Virtues and Failings, and thereby have a better Opportunity of suiting the various Degrees of Charity, as the Case requires.

IN our Christian Societies, the most obvious Relation is between such as be *Teachers*, and those which are *taught*; the *former* should have a tender Regard to the Welfare of their Hearers, especially of their Souls; that they may prosper; and to that End should *feed them with the sincere Milk of the Word, so as they may grow thereby*, i. e. should place Gospel Truths in the easiest and most natural Light they are capable of; and out of Charity to the spiritual Interest of their Hearers, should mostly insist on those Gospel Truths, which have the greatest Tendency to enforce a godly Practice, leading them from a notional to a practical Religion, and daring to declare the whole Will of their Lord and Master, without any Fear of Men, as being absolutely Servants only to their Lord Christ, and conditionally such to Men, for Christ's sake.

BESIDES, this Love to the Souls of Men will oblige them more privately to offer Instruction, Reproof, Advice, or Consolation, according to the Necessities or Desires of the People, and the Probability there is of doing real Service; and this they must do, with an equal Regard to all they are related to, as Pastors or Teachers, because the Souls of all are of equal Value.

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As to the common Deportment and Conversation of such as feed the Flock of Christ, it ought to be as becomes the Gospel, and exemplary unto others: They should become all Things unto all Men, as far as Innocence will permit, giving an Example of a kind, benevolent, convertible Disposition, and a settled Inclination to all the friendly Offices of social Life, thereby setting before others, a Specimen of the Influence Christianity should have in promoting Peace upon Earth, and good Will towards Men. And such a Conduct (whatever mistaken Notions some may have of it) will be a real Instance of Love and Charity to the Souls of Men, by representing Religion to be what it is, an amiable Form, design'd for the real Benefit of Mankind in this World, as well as that which is to come; which may be a means of wearing out those deform'd Apprehensions many have concerning Religion, and, in Time, of reconciling them to it.

ON the other Hand, the *Hearers* in any Christian Society should abound in Love and Charity to those who labour in the Word and Doctrine; their Relation to them demands a more distinguishing Affection, than what is due to every Fellow-Christian, because their Welfare and Capacity for Service is of more Importance to the Christian Church, than that of any private Christian; and therefore Conscience should be made of giving them all suitable Encouragement in the Work of the Lord, of treating them with Honour and Respect; and if they have not exposed themselves, even common Charity requires as great a Concern, at least, for their Reputation, as your own; and, consequently, an Abhorrence of all such base Practices as wound in secret, and a just Resentment against those who practise or encourage such clandestine ill Offices, as tend to destroy the Usefulness of Ministers, or the Peace of Societies.

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FELLOW-MEMBERS of Christian Societies, ought to abound in all the various Offices of Charity to one another, according to their Progress in the Christian Life. Those who have a Zeal for God, attended with fervent Charity towards their Brethren, and who keep themselves by Purity and Sobriety, in a Capacity for all relative Duty, are entitled, not only to our Benevolence, but Complacency; and since no Man is perfect upon Earth, we must make some Allowances for Defects in this Character, and not be too severe in censuring real Faults, or be hasty in lessening our Affections upon every Miscarriage; for we ourselves are liable to the same, or perhaps, greater Faults, and were we to fall into such, should be glad Men would judge favourably of us, and not immediately shew an Aversion to us, on the Account of them; *what you would therefore Men should do unto you, do you even so unto them.* This is exactly what St. Paul directs to, when he says, *Brethren, if any Man be overtaken in a Fault,* Gal. vi. 1, *ye that are spiritual, restore such a one in the Spirit of Meekness, considering thy self, lest thou also art tempted.*

NAY, in Case of Offences and Wrongs to ourselves, we are not to blab out our Complaints, and spread them abroad, till we have expostulated the Case with the Offender; and if that prove ineffectual, he must be spoke to before a few others, *that in the Mouth of two or three Witnesses, every Word may be establish'd,* Mat. xviii. 16, 17. i. e. by this means your Complaint when it comes to be made publick, will be an establish'd Word, attested by sufficient Witnesses upon whose Credit it may be receiv'd; and indeed no evil Report should be taken up, till well attested, nay, though it be so, we should

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not shew a Fondness for propagating such a Report; and least of all should we allow ourselves in so wicked a Practice, as raising an evil Report of our Neighbour, without any real Foundation for it; because Charity forbids all these Things, and directs to all mutual Kindnesses, and good Offices for one another's Edification; whereas, if Censure and Calumny be indulged among any Persons or Societies, nothing better can ensue than Confusion, and every evil Work.

II. I will consider how Charity unites Persons and Things.

I. CHARITY unites the Persons it obtains among.

THIS it does by making Persons amiable to each other, and by rendering all Temptations to Animosity and Discord ineffectual.

PERSONS of a charitable Spirit are meek and humble, mild and gentle, patient and forbearing, and always have an Inclination to Clemency and Forgiveness: This Disposition renders them amiable in some Degree unto all Men, and in a still higher Degree unto such as partake with them in the same Temper: There is something so lovely in kind and beneficent Actions, that all Persons are naturally pleased with them, though they have no Share in the Beneficence; but then it's supposed, that such Actions proceed from a Love to Mankind, and an Inclination to do Good; for if it be only suspected, that such Actions are done from a selfish Motive or Design, all the Beauty of them is lost, and no one counts them Praise-worthy. If then a kind and charitable Disposition, be in
itself

itself so lovely, as to engage the Notice and Esteem of the least Discerning, of the common Herd of Mankind, the boisterous or the stupid, who seldom feel any kind Emotions in their Breasts, it must certainly be more lovely to those who have the like Frame of Spirit ; and mutual Offices of Kindness, as flowing from such a Temper, will make Persons highly amiable, and cause them to take the greatest Complacency in each other ; for *where two are thus agreed, (whatever else they differ about,) they may walk together*, i. e. have a great Intimacy together, and find real Pleasure in their mutual Familiarity and Converse.

CHARITY also tends to unite Persons among whom it obtains, by rendering all Temptations to Animosity and Discord ineffectual : For this Virtue contains in it a settled Inclination to Quietness and Peace, and all the good Affections of Gentleness, Tenderneſs, and Brotherly-Love ; so that whoever is endow'd with this Grace of Charity, can bear Insults and Injuries without any great Resentment, and entirely without Revenge : Such a one is always inclin'd to put the best Construction upon every Thing, and to allow for the Tempers and Capacities, the Prejudices and Infirmities of his Neighbour : He can impute a hard Saying to Inadvertency, or Indiscretion ; and a bad Action to Passion or Mistake, rather than Malice. Thus being clothed with Charity, he is disposed to hide a Multitude of Faults : But, if they are too many or great to be passed by without Notice, then he bears all Things, unless his own Preservation, and the Safety of others makes a Defence or Prosecution necessary ; and, when he has got the better in either of these, he will endeavour to assuage the Enmity of his Ad-

versary by kind Offices; and so, if possible, overcome Evil with Good.

Thus, Charity is a wonderful Cement, in Case of Personal Breaches; and is, of all others, the most Perfect Bond of Union.

II. CHARITY unites the Interests of Persons among whom it obtains.

1 Cor. xiii.
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1 Cor. x.
24.
Phil. ii. 4.

CHARITY has for one Part of her Character this, *that she seeks not her own*, i. e. it is not a narrow selfish Principle, which inclines a Man, only to take Care of himself, and his own Interest, but is a Principle inclining a Man to be as servicable as he can, to all about him: To this Purpose, is the Apostle Paul's Advice in two Places, *viz. Let no Man seek his own, but every Man another's Wealth.* And again: *Look not every Man on his own Things, but every Man also on the Things of others.* For Charity was designed to correct all inordinate Self-Love, (which is the Spring of most Wickedness,) to fit and qualify Men for Society, and make them capable of those moral Pleasures resulting from good Actions, which infinitely exceed all selfish Grati-
fications.

THE charitable Man, therefore, will be concerned for the Interest of his Neighbour, as well as his own; the Rule he walks by, is, to do unto others, as he can with Reason expect they should do unto him; for which Cause he is not only just and righteous in all his Dealings, but kind also, and beneficent, according to his own Ability, and his Neighbour's Want.

SUCH a one will be far from envying the better Fortune or Character of his Neighbour; for *Charity envyeth not*, but takes Pleasure in the Prosperity of others, and gladly improves all
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all Opportunities he has of preventing any Damage to his Brother's Circumstances or Fame: He knows that a good Name is better than precious Ointment, nay, valuable as Life, and therefore opposes the Current of Scandal, and Calumny wherever he can; nay, though he know somewhat amiss of his Neighbour, yet, *being of a faithful Spirit, he conceals the Matter*, if it be not very heinous and detrimental to Society; for he scorns that *Flattery, which revealeth Secrets; and Tale-bearing which stirreth up Strife*, as knowing, that *a Whisperer separateth Chief Friends*, and the Lord hateb him who soweth *Discord among Brethren*. Prov. xi. 13.
Prov. xx. 19,
Prov. xvi. 19.

THUS Charity will make a Man of Understanding to be of an excellent Spirit, and is the only Principle, that can curb a narrow selfish Disposition, and render the separate Interests of different Men, consistent with each other.

III. THE Union resulting from Charity is a Perfection.

I. It is the Perfection of all Societies.

WHATEVER be the Structure or Form of any Society, is not so material, as its answering the great End of all Society, viz. the mutual Security and Advantage of all its Members; and all voluntary Societies are entered into, or continued in, upon this Presumption.

THOUGH the artificial Bonds of Society may pretty tolerably unite Persons, and for the most Part, prevent notorious Violence and Outrage; yet, unless they be also united upon a Principle of mutual Benevolence and Affection, the End of any Society will not be

be so well answered, and the Stability of it will be precarious.

Thus in Civil Societies, though there may be ever so many good Laws for their Security; yet, if a selfish Temper prevails, it will lead to a great many Acts of Injustice or Inhumanity: And, if there be any strong selfish Combination, so as to split a Community into different Parties, it is easy to apprehend, how a Society may thereby be endanger'd; for it is both a natural and revealed Principle, that a Kingdom divided against itself cannot stand: But where a Spirit of Humanity and Kindness obtains, and such a Regard is had to the Good of the Whole, that publick Benevolence takes place of all selfish Views, and private Benevolence, there any Society may be stiled perfect; because it has nothing within itself to prevent any Measures being taken that may be for its Benefit, and it is so thoroughly united, as not to be easily affected by external Force.

THE Case is the same, as to religious Societies: All particular Churches and Congregations that be Christian, are only so many Branches of Christ's universal Church, related to one another by their common Christianity; just as particular Civil Societies are only different Branches of the general Society of Mankind, wherein they are related to one another, by their common Humanity; and, in like Manner as civil Societies, whatever their different Forms may be, cannot be so perfect or so well united, as they should be without those human Dispositions of Love and Kindness, which Men owe one another as Fellow-Creatures of the same Nature; so, particular Christian Churches, however diversify'd

fified from one another, by their own By-Laws and Customs, cannot any of them maintain a thorough Peace and Union among themselves, without that general Duty of Charity which they owe unto all who partake with them, in what is properly and truly the common Christianity.

THIS is the true Bond which unites all Christians, and renders them a compleat perfect Body: And this Charity is the only Thing that can make any particular Society perfect, or fully united among themselves. Upon this Account, more than any other, the Apostle stiles Charity, the *Bond of Perfectness*; for he had before expressed his earnest Desire, that the *Colossians*, and all other Christians, *might be knit together in Love*; and therefore in the Text he must be supposed to mean thus, *Put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfectness*, i. e. which is the Bond of that perfect Union there ought to be in the Body of Christ, whereby the whole Church becomes perfect, or one compleat Body. Col. iii. 1, 2.

THAT this is the direct Meaning of St. Paul, will appear farther, from a Passage in his Epistles to the *Ephesians*, where speaking of the whole Church he says, *He gave some Apostles, some Prophets, some Evangelists, some Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come to the Unity of Faith, and of the Knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature, of the Fullness of Christ*; and how we may arrive at this Perfection, he shews, by adding, *But speaking the Truth in Love*, (or rather as it should be translated, *being real or true in Love*;) *we may grow up into him in all Things, who is the Head,* Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13.
Αληθινῶς
τις ἐν ἀγά-
πῃ, 15, 16.
even

Ver. 3.

even Christ, from whom the whole Body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every Joint supplieth, according to the effectual Working, in the Measure of every Part, maketh Increase of the Body, unto the edifying of itself in Love: And in the Beginning of the Chapter, whence this Quotation is fetch'd, the Apostle styles Love the Bond of Peace, which clearly intimates what he intends by the Bond of Perfectness.

HENCE it's evident, that in the Judgment of St. Paul, Charity, or Love, is the great Center of Unity for all the Churches of Christ; and if they agree in this, (whatever else they differ about,) they more shew the Unity of the Body, than if there were the greatest Unity of Opinion, with a Difference in Affection.

AND as to particular Churches, if there be not a mutual Love between the Members of them, a Love inclining each of them to wish and desire, that every Thing may be done for the Service of the whole Society, rather than to satisfy their own particular Humour or Interest, there is no Assurance that such a Society can long subsist; for clashing Interests and Humours will produce Strife; and those who cannot carry their Point, will think themselves aggrieved, and be tempted to seek for Peace and Edification elsewhere; by which Means Societies are dispers'd, and come to nothing. But Charity is the Bond of Peace, creates a peaceable Union wherever it obtains; and by thus giving Stability to religious Societies, makes them perfect.

2. THE Union resulting from Charity, is the perfecting Character of a Christian: Or, nothing more compleats a Christian's Character, than

than to be in perfect Union with all the Members of Christ Jesus. This makes Christians perfect and compleat, wanting nothing; just as a Sympathy between Members of the same natural Body, discovers not only their Relation, but Compleatness: that they are not defective, but perfect, and fitted for the Service of the Body they belong to.

THE greatest Blessing Christ wishes his Followers in this World, is a strict Union among themselves; and this, as their highest Perfection at present; for thus he earnestly prays for them, *Holy Father, keep through thy Name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.* ----- *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their Word; that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.* ----- *And the Glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.* And that this Union, which true Christians have with one another, and thereby with God and Christ, is an Union founded on mutual Affection, appears from the Testimony of the same Apostle, who recites the just now quoted Prayer of our Lord; for in his first general Epistle, he thus writes;

John xvii.
11, 20, 21,
22, 23.

BELOVED, let us love one another, for Love is of God, and every one that loveth, is born of God. ----- If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his Love is perfected in us. ----- He that dwelleth in Love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. ----- If a Man say, I love God, and hateth his Brother, he is a Liar; for he that loveth not his Brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen? And

John iv.
7, 12, 16,
20.

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again,

1 John iii.
10, 23.

again, he further says, *that in this the Children of God are manifest, and the Children of the Devil; whosoever doth not Righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his Brother.--- This is the Commandment of God, that we should believe on the Name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us Commandment.* Hence it's evident, that uncharitable Persons are Children of the Devil, and Charity is set upon a Level with Faith in Christ; and therefore, since Faith, without Love, will not entitle a Man to any beneficial Relation to God and Christ, that Union which results from Charity must be the perfecting Character of a Christian.

3. THAT Union which results from Charity, is the perfecting Felicity of human Life.

ONE may appeal for the Truth of this, to the Tranquility of those Minds that are at Peace with all Men: How calm and easy is their Passage through Life? and how little are they disturb'd with the unavoidable Calamities of it, in comparison with other Men? For the Principle of Charity that unites Persons, unites also their Interests, and makes them chearfully to bear one another's Burdens, and alleviate each other's Misery.

NAY, though a Person who is united to his Fellow-Creatures and Christians, upon the generous Principles of Humanity and Charity, should be so unfortunate, as to be situated among those who have no such Turn of Mind; yet he has a real Spring of Happiness within himself, and escapes much of that Disquietude which the selfish Appetites and Passions betray Men to.

BUT

BUT where any Number of Persons are united together by cordial Affection, and mutually improve all Opportunities of serving each other, there the most perfect earthly Happiness is to be found; for the greatest Pleasures, as well as the highest Virtues of this present State, consist in the kind and charitable Offices of social Life.

4. THE Union resulting from *Charity* compleats the *Felicity* of Heaven.

CHARITY of all the Christian Virtues, is the greatest and most durable; for if we take it in the largest Sense, as including Love to God, as well as brotherly Love, it is the Spring of all other Virtue; for without it nothing that we can do will be either good or praise-worthy.

It is for the promoting a Temper of Love, that all spiritual Means and Motives are design'd; and since our present Knowledge is very imperfect, and cannot compleat us, or make us perfect in Love, we may expect that the clear intuitive Knowledge of the future State will; for how many or few soever of our present Virtues will have any Being in the other World, we may be sure, Charity will be the chief then, as well as now. This seems to be the Meaning of the Apostle Paul, in his Description of Charity, when he says, *Charity never faileth; but whether there be Prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be Tongues, they shall cease; whether there be Knowledge, it shall vanish away; for we know in part, and prophecy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.* ---- And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity,

1 Cor. xiii.
8, 9, 10,
13.

ty, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity.

THE Happiness of Heaven is, throughout Scripture, represented as a social one; the Inhabitants of Heaven are describ'd as one great Society, incorporated under Christ, as their common Head; and their Employments and Entertainments are shadowed out to us, to be such as they all partake in; no selfish solitary Delights, but a Community of Happiness, which is render'd compleat, by the happy Spirits mutually rejoicing in each other's Felicity, and perpetually conversing together in Fellowships of Joy.

Now all this Felicity arises from that entire Union there is among the blessed Inhabitants of the happy World above: They are all united in their Aims and Views, have no mean separate Interest to pursue, but all combine in the same grateful Work, of searching out and contemplating the variously display'd Beauties of the Deity, and in rendring *all Glory, Honour, and Praise, unto him that sits upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*

THIS Union, and all the Happiness resulting from it, derives from Love; for without Love there is no Happiness, at least, no social one; and, therefore, since that strait Union, which obtains among the heavenly Household, and is the Spring of all their mutual Joy, arises chiefly from that fervent Love which those beatified Spirits entertain for God and Christ, and one another, it must follow, that the Union resulting from Charity, compleats even the Felicity of Heaven.

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THUS Charity unites Persons and Things, and contributes to the Perfection of them wherever it obtains; or, in the Phrase of the Text, *is the Bond of Perfection.*

II. *The Excellency of Charity should prevail upon us, to put it on.*

THE Excellency of Charity, being so very great, not only in itself, but with regard to us, should engage us to comply with the Apostle's Injunction of putting it on: No Dress can be more becoming for the New Man to appear in, than this; for it is the chief and principal Gospel Grace or Virtue, in as much as all other Graces either flow from it, or be subservient to it; therefore we should adorn ourselves with this amiable Grace above all Things, because it will cast a Lustre upon all our other Graces, and give a real Value and Goodness to our whole relative Behaviour.

BUT if, besides this, *Charity* be so excellent with regard to us, as to make up a substantial Part of our present and future Happiness, we are very unkind to ourselves, if we cannot be prevailed with to put it on; for, upon this Supposition, our obeying the Law of Love will be giving the Principle of Self-Love the best Direction, and consulting our own real Interest after the best Manner: If we have, therefore, any just Regard for our own Welfare, we ought gratefully to acknowledge the Goodness and Kindness of God to us in his enjoining us that as our Duty, which has the greatest Tendency to our Happiness, and should (by carefully attending to this Duty

Duty of Charity) be Workers together with God for our own Good.

Col.iii. 12. But before we can put on Charity, or any of those tender and kind Dispositions, that flow from it, which the Apostle thus reckons up, viz. *Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-Suffering, Forbearing, and Forgiving one another*; I say, before we can put on these, and Charity over or above them, we must put off, or lay aside, certain evil Practices, which proceed from quite contrary Dispositions with the foregoing ones, and are altogether inconsistent with Charity. What these are, St. Paul expressly mentions, a few Verses before the Text, where he says, Col.iii. 8. *Put off all these, Anger, Wrath, Malice, Blasphemy, filthy Communication out of your Mouths; and lie not one to another.*

I. BEFORE you pretend to put on *Charity*, put off *Anger, Wrath, Malice.*

THESE are only different Degrees of the same unruly Passion, and proceed from one and the same bitter Root, which is Pride; for we daily see by Experience, that your proud haughty People are apt to resent every small Trifle, to be angry with every Thing that suits not their Humour, and quarrel with every Person that will not truckle to their insolent Behaviour, or pay them Honours they have no just Pretence to.

ANGER is the first Emotion of the Mind, which may be innocent, while proportioned to the Moment of Things, and design'd for the Reform of Persons we have any proper Business with: But if it be harbour'd till it commences Wrath, it is criminal; and most of

of all so, if by Indulgence it be suffered to degenerate into Malice. Now Pride is what will blow up the Passions to this pernicious Height, above any Thing else; and, therefore, we must root out this evil Affection, that we may the more easily put off Anger, Wrath, Malice, and put on Charity, which is a Disposition the most opposite to them of any other whatsoever; for *Charity*, we are ^{1 Cor. xiii.} told, *vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, is not easily provoked.*

2. Before we can put on *Charity* we must lay aside *Blasphemy* or Evil-speaking.

THE proper Signification of *Blasphemy*, is, the hurting, or sulling, the Fame or Character of any one; and though we have by Custom appropriated the Word in our Language to dishonourable Expressions concerning God, or his Perfections, yet it may, with equal Propriety, be apply'd to any Disparagement of one another's Character among Men; and in this Sense the Apostle intends it, as appears by the Context.

Now a Habit of defaming, or even slightly treating the Character of others, is inconsistent with any due Regard to the just Rights of Men; and, therefore, till Persons have broke such a Habit, they are utterly incapable of *Charity*; for *Charity thinketh no Evil*, i. e. will not receive bad Impressions ^{1 Cor. xiii.} from idle Reports, or the bare Appearance of what is amiss; but puts the best Construction upon Things, and will hide or extenuate real Failings, till they become too notorious to be hid or excused; but these generous and kind Offices of *Charity* cannot be expected

pected from such as are gone far in a contrary Habit ; for they must cease to do Evil, and leave off prejudicing the Fame of their Neighbours, before they can shew Mercy, and put off all Blasphemy, or Evil-Speaking, before they can put on *Charity, which is kind.*

1 Cor. xiii.

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3. BEFORE we can put on *Charity*, the Apostle says, we must put all *filthy Communication* out of our Mouths.

αἰσχρολογία.

THE Word that we translate, *filthy Communication*, signifies also, *reproachful Words*, and, perhaps, ought so to be understood here ; for as St. Paul has made use of three Terms to express the different Degrees of Resentment against our Neighbour, so he forbids three distinct Ways of prejudicing him by our Words, viz. Evil-Speaking, reproachful Language, and Lying ; the first as proceeding from Anger, or at least Want of Love ; the second from Wrath ; and the last from Malice.

1 Cor. xiii.

5.

Now, as Evil-Speaking is inconsistent with Charity, so is a Habit of reproachful Language upon every considerable Provocation ; and therefore must be laid aside before a Man can be capable of Charity, whose Character is, that *it behaveth not itself unseemly* : For, when Persons are so outrageous, as to stick at no Reproach, so they can but asperse those they are wrathful against, it discovers a large Degree of Hatred, and sets them at a greater Distance from Charity, than a foolish Habit of Babbling, and hurting without so much Design, does ; for this Reason it ought to be carefully guarded against ; because it is naturally

fully impossible, that any whose Spirits are apt to be blown up into such a Hurricane, by even considerable Provocations, should, while they are so untractable, be ever able to put on *Charity*, which *beareth all Things*. 1 Cor. xiii.

4. A HABIT of *Lying* one to another, must be entirely broke before we can put on *Charity*.

ALL Deceiving of our Neighbour, especially in Things of any Consequence to him, is very unjust, as well as unkind; for it is doing him a real Prejudice, (whether we design it, or not,) by leading him to act contrary to the real State of Things; but, if there be a Design, by premeditated Falshood, to hurt our Neighbour, it betrays a fixed Hatred, and deliberate Malice, and sets a Man at the greatest possible Distance from Love or Charity: All Lying, therefore, (whether we only intend to deceive, or also design to prejudice,) must be laid aside; for if a Man delights in such a Practice, he cannot put on *Charity*, which *rejoiceth not in such Iniquity, but rejoiceth in (or with) the Truth*. 1 Cor. xiii. 6.

HAVING put off all these Things, be persuaded to put on Charity, for the following Reasons:

I. BECAUSE we shall thereby become like unto God and Christ.

God's Design, in all Discoveries he has made of himself, is, that his reasonable Creatures should become as like him as may be: Of all the Characters of the Deity there is none

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more visible, either in the Book of Nature, or Grace, than his universal Benevolence to all, and his particular Complacency in those which are good. God, he is Love, an inexhaustible Fountain of never-failing Goodness; and all his Dispensations towards us, do evidently declare him to be such: Thus, he at first created all Things, from no other Motive than his own Inclination to communicate of his Goodness unto others; and he still preserves his Creatures in being, furnishing out all those Accommodations, which be suitable to their State and Rank, that he might fully answer his own Benevolent Inclination, and intimate unto his reasonable Creatures, how he continually delights in doing Good, and how much it is his Will, that they should imitate him, and by mutual Love and Charity promote the Happiness of all about them.

By thus doing, Men become like unto God, their heavenly Father, as our Lord Christ argues, from a Text already consider'd: And, if the Bounties of God's Providence discover unto us so much Goodness for our Imitation, how much stronger is the Example of generous disinterested Love, which he has given us in that Grace, which came by Jesus Christ? The whole Procedure of that Grace, was an Evidence of the strongest Love; it was a Love to Enemies, and so beneficial to them, as to lay a Foundation, not only for their escaping Misery, but their obtaining a blessed and glorious Immortality.

It is in Imitation of this exalted Love, that we are exhorted to fervent Charity:

1 John iv.
19.

Beloved, (says the Apostle *John*;) *if God so loved*

loved us, we ought also to love one another; and it should be extended to the like Objects, even to Enemies, and such as have offended us, as God's Love extended to us, while we were yet Sinners: For St. Paul in the Verse before the Text, thus exhorts, viz. *Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

NOTHING can be our greater Glory or Happiness, than our Imitation of God in this his Temper and Spirit of Love. It was the unhappy Ambition of our first Parents, to covet a Likeness with God, in his natural Perfections; but were that attainable by us, in the Degree they wished for it, yet it would not be any such Glory or Benefit to us, in Comparison with what a Likeness to God in his moral Perfections will be; for the highest natural Excellencies would be of no Value, where there were no moral Perfections to direct how they should be employ'd; and infinite Knowledge and Power, without Justice and Goodness, would be only a Capacity of doing infinite Harm and Mischief. An Imitation, therefore, of God's moral Excellencies is the only Thing that can make our natural Powers of any Use or Value; the only Thing that can raise our Natures to what Degree of Perfection or Happiness they are capable of. Since then the Goodness and Love of God shine brighter to us than all the rest of his moral Characters, and render all his other Excellencies more amiable to his Creatures; we, by imitating him in this Particular, shall become like him in what is his greatest Glory, and therefore must be ours; and what is more encouraging is this, that no Creature, which bears any Resemblance to God's moral Perfections, can be thoroughly miserable; and

whoever bears the greatest Resemblance to him must, next to him, be of all other Beings the most happy.

Now Love and Charity to all our Fellow-Creatures, and especially our Fellow-Christians, will raise us to the nearest Resemblance with God and his Love; for thus St. *John* assures us,
 1 John iv. 12. *that although no Man hath seen God at any Time, yet if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his Love is perfected in us.*

Our Lord Christ also, who is stiled *the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person*, gave us a very lively Example of Love and Charity while he dwelt in Flesh; for he continually went about, doing good, and after a tedious Course of Sufferings, gave his Life a Ransom for many: This was the greatest Instance of Love that could be shown in our Nature; for as Christ himself expresses it, *greater Love hath no Man than this, that a Man lay down his Life for his Friends*; but St. *Paul*, in Commendation of this Love, says, that while
 Heb. i. 3. *we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us.*
 Mat. xx. 28. *This high Degree of Love we cannot fully come up to; but according to the Measure of our Ability, we ought to be Followers of Christ, and if we are called to suffer, as Christ was, we must follow his Steps, who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not.* ---- Nay, the Apostle says, *we ought, in such Circumstances, to lay down our Lives for the Brethren.* But where our Circumstances are better, we are still obliged to set the Example of Christ before us, as a constant Motive to the Exercise of fervent Charity to all his Members, that we may become like him in this present State; and if so, we shall be like him also hereafter, for we shall see him as he is; and

1 Pet. ii. 21, 23. *we shall see him as he is; and*
 1 John iii. 16. *we shall see him as he is; and*
 Col. iii. 4. *we shall see him as he is; and*

and when he appears, shall appear with him, in Glory.

2. LET us put on *Charity*, because it is necessary to the Acceptance of our Prayers.

IF we are not kind and beneficent to others, how can we expect that God should be so to us? And if we are severe and implacable towards those who have wrong'd and disoblig'd us, how can we expect God will forgive our daily Provocations of him?

OUR Saviour has directed us to pray after this Manner, viz. *Forgive us our Debts, as we forgive our Debtors*; then adds, *for if ye forgive Men their Trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your Father forgive your Trespases*; and again, *When ye stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any, that your Father also, which is in Heaven, may forgive your Trespases*.

Mat. vi. 12.

14. 15.

Mark xi.

25.

HENCE it's evident, that we must have Love one to another, if we expect to be heard when we pray for the Love and Mercy of God: It is but equitable we should receive from God the same Measure we mete unto others; for however, he may not reward us according to our Iniquities against himself, yet he has not promised to be merciful to those who are void of Affection to their Fellow-Creatures, but hath threatned, that *such shall have Judgment without Mercy, who have shewed no Mercy*.

James ii.

13.

CHARITY is likewise necessary to the Success of publick Prayer, as well as private; it is probable God has many Blessings to bestow in Consequence of the publick united Prayers of his Church and People. Want of Charity among the Members of religious Societies, interrupts that

that Union which is necessary, and thereby prevents the Descent of those Blessings, which might otherwise be obtained.

Is we are therefore desirous of being heard in those Things we at any Time pray unto God for, let us, as the Apostle John advises, *not love in Word, neither in Tongue, but in Deed, and in Truth; and hereby we know that we are of the Truth, and shall assure our Hearts before him. --- For if our Heart condemn us not, then we have Confidence towards God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his Commandments, and do those Things that are pleasing in his Sight.*

1 John iii.
18, 19, 21,
22.

3. PUT on Charity, because it will be the best Evidence of our Love to God and Christ at the great Day of Judgment.

To this Purpose is what has been already quoted from St. John, viz. *Every one that loveth is born of God, --- and he that loveth not his Brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

1 John iv. 7,
21.

By the Account also which Christ gives us of the Day of Judgment, Mat. xxv. we find the main Enquiry will be what Evidence Men can bring of their Love to Christ, by any Offices of Kindness or Compassion they have done to his Brethren; and we must remember, that all Men are his Brethren in a natural Sense, though few are in a spiritual one; and though a greater Love of Complacency be due to true Christians who are possessed of the Spirit and Temper of Christ, than to other Men; yet kind compassionate Offices are due to all who want them; and if they are perform'd out of a Principle of Charity, we need not doubt but Christ will

will accept of them, and place them to Account, as if done to himself. Then,

LET these, and all the foregoing Considerations, prevail with us, to look upon Charity as a perfecting Grace or Virtue, and to endeavour after that Temper and Frame of Spirit, which the Gospel makes so necessary to our being Members of Christ Jesus; and to our Endeavours, let us add fervent Prayers, to the God of Love, that we may be taught of him to love one another, and to increase therein more and more, that we may be of the Number of them *who dwell in Love, and thereby dwell in God,* ^{1 John iv.} and have God dwelling in them; ^{16, 17.} and herein may our Love be perfected, that we may have Boldness in the Day of Judgment.

F I N I S.



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